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ABSTRACT

This paper examines implicit curricula which consist of the messages imparted by the classroom and school environment. Among the outcomes that have been attributed to implicit curricula are individual and societal effects that foster conformity to national ideals and social conventions while maintaining socioeconomic and cultural inequalities. Three elements identified as exerting these influences are organizational, interpersonal, and institutional environments of schools. These influences are discussed, using examples and illustrations from social studies and other subject areas. Organizational aspects of implicit curricula include the arrangement and use of time, facilities, materials, and examinations as well as the manifest curriculum. Interpersonal aspects of implicit curricula typically refer to teacher-student relationships, but might also include other relationships such as teacher-administrator and teacher-parent. Institutional aspects of implicit curricula include the school's policies, routine procedures and rituals, the social structure of the school, and the array of extracurricular activities and services available to students and the community. The paper concludes with a discussion of mediation, negotiation, and change. Schools, with their implicit and manifest curricula, seem to be neither the all power instruments of cultural reproduction as some have claimed nor the centers of resistance and prime sources of emancipation as others have hoped. Instead, schools appear to encompass elements fostering stability as well as stresses that might provide impetus for change. (RM)

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Negotiating Implicit Curricula in Social Education

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Negotiating Implicit Curricula in Social Education

In school, students seem to obtain knowledge that is not publicly set forth in official statements of school philosopy or purpose or in course guides and syllabi. This learning, which includes information, beliefs, and ways of behaving in one's society, is often attributed to a hidden curriculum of schooling.[1]

Hidden curriculum is an intuitively attractive phrase, one that gives the appearance of accounting for the complexity of how schools affect students and why schools resist change. It tends, however, to label more than to explain.

Typically, the hidden curriculum is portrayed as a powerful, detrimental force that undermines the professed commitments of schooling to foster intellectual development and democratic values. Attention to a hidden curriculum is often associated with critique of the perceived authoritarianism and inequities of primary and secondary schooling in politically democratic societies (e.g., Giroux & Penna, 1979).

It may be that the usefulness of hidden curriculum as a vehicle for criticism depends in part on a degree of amorphousness that precludes close scrutiny. The possibility of a pernicious hidden curriculum, however, demands careful attention to

its operation and influence. The questions of interest are not whether the hidden curriculum is hidden -- by whom, from whom, when or how -- but what is to be found.

Rather then being hidden, the phenomenon known as the hidden curriculum is tacit insofar as its presence is implied and often taken-for-granted rather than directly acknowledged and examined. In addition, it appears to be both complex and plural, with varying features and targets, academic and social, across time and place (e.g., Anyon, 1980, 1981; Apple & King, 1977; Dreeben, 1968; Fielding, 1981; Henry, 1955, 1957; Jackson, 1968; Overly, 1970; Snyder, 1971). Consequently, if one's purpose is to extend understanding of the conditions, processes, and effects of schooling, it seems more appropriate to pursue the possibilities of implicit curricula than to speak of the hidden curriculum.

Implicit curricula consist of the messages imparted by the classroom and school environment. In a McLuhanian sense, the medium is a large part of the message, if not the predominant message (also, see Henry, 1963). As one illustration, consider the multiple choice question, which often appears on practice exercises and tests. Regardless of the topic, both the questions considered worth raising and the alternative responses are presented to the student. Students are directed

to choose from those options provided by authorities (e.g., teacher, textbook author, examiner), only one of which is presumably correct. Thus, students are presented with an illusion of choice (Smollett, 1973) that can be viewed as preparation for the limited definition and practice of freedom they are likely to encounter in adult society where problems are often defined by others, and decisions are made by selecting from predetermined alternatives.

The messages of implicit curricula might complement, contradict, or parallel the formal, manifest curriculum of reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and other subjects. Attention to implicit curricula is particularly relevant when one's concern is social studies education or social education more generally. To the extent that implicit curricula communicate undemocratic or antidemocratic messages, they are incongruent with the professed intent of democratic social education to foster human dignity, opportunity, justice, and rational decision-making.

The major purpose of this inquiry is to examine claims made in behalf of implicit curricula that relate to social education. What seems to be the nature of implicit curricula? What is the evidence of their operation and impact? A second purpose is to consider how students and other people in schools deal with implicit curricula and how implicit curricula might

be renegotiated. Finally, to what extent is the implicit curricula construct likely to facilitate efforts to describe, explain, or improve school social studies experiences?

Claims and Evidence

Among the outcomes that have been attributed to implicit curricula are individual and societal effects that foster conformity to national ideals and social conventions while maintaining socioeconomic and cultural inequalities. Individual students are assumed to acquire prevailing world views, norms, and values as well as predefined and usually subordinate roles in authority relationships. Collectively, such effects have been seen as serving a social control function by perpetuating existing social structures and the standards that support them. Elements of implicit curricula identified as exerting these influences include aspects of the organizational, interpersonal, and institutional environment of schools, ranging from certain features of texts and other curriculum materials to teacher-student interactions and school policies and routines.

Organizational Aspects

Organizational aspects of implicit curricula include the arrangement and use of time, facilities, materials, and examinations as well as the manifest curriculum. The school curriculum not only provides opportunities for learning certain

subjects, but it minimizes opportunities for learning others. In this way, the explicit curriculum implicitly communicates what is considered important (for example, that history, which is usually required, is more important than the social sciences, which are usually optional if available at all). What counts as worthwhile knowledge is also suggested by time allocations, the sequencing of subjects, the number and range of facilities and materials provided, and examination practices. In United States elementary schools, for example, reading and language arts are usually scheduled daily for approximately two hours in the morning, followed by mathematics. In contrast, social studies is usually scheduled two or three times per week, for less than an hour, and most often in the afternoon (Weiss, 1978). If events require a change in schedule, social studies is more likely to be abandoned than is reading. In addition, fewer facilities and materials (textbooks, workbooks, audio-visual media) are typically available for social studies, and social studies is not emphasized on routinely administered standardized tests or in special assistance programs. (I have yet to encounter Title I social studies or remedial social studies classes in U.S. public schools.)

Thus, the organization and implementation of the manifest curriculum indicates what subjects are to be taken most seriously by teachers and students. Further, the compartmentalization

of the curriculum into separate subjects suggests that knowledge is not or should not be integrated and that school knowledge is different and separate from everyday life. The degree of curricular flexibility is yet another aspect of implicit curricula. To the extent that the manifest curriculum is standardized and inflexible, the message might be communicated that knowledge is given, handed down by authorities, and not to be questioned by the uninitiated. Proper form may even come to take precedence over substance.

Just as the questions, "What is selected for inclusion in the curriculum as a whole?" and "How is it treated?" reveal aspects of the school's implicit curricula, similar questions asked of specific subjects and of the textbooks and other curriculum materials used within subjects reveal additional implicit messages. Although textbooks are seen primarily as repositories and conveyors of subject matter, they communicate more than information. For example, texts that minimize social and intellectual diversity and conflict (Apple, 1971; Popkewitz, 1977; Riccards, 1972) or that legitimize existing political and economic institutions (Anyon, 1978, 1979) and selected cultural values (Bowers, 1977) not only offer misleading notions of social science and history but might foster support for dominant groups and the status quo.

Insofar as texts are treated as the sole or most authoritative sources of knowledge rather than as inevitably biased summary interpretations, they can contribute to the reification of knowledge, dependence on authority, and denial of personal experience.[2] Anyon's (1981) comparative investigation of what counts as knowledge in elementary schools in different SES communities found that students, particularly in working and middle class communities, tend to believe that knowledge is something to be acquired primarily from teachers, books, and other authorities. For example, in her interviews with 80 fifth-grade students concerning the nature and source of knowledge, students said they could acquire knowledge (by "doing pages in our books and things," by "doing your work in school") but that they could not create knowledge.

Another illustration of students' perceptions regarding school knowledge comes from a field study of a two and one-half week "Europe unit" in a 7th grade social studies class (Korth, Cornbleth, & DeAngelis, in progress). Interviews with students following daily observation of their class revealed students' perception of the importance of notes. It appeared that the "organization skills" that the teacher saw herself as emphasizing served to facilitate the acquisition, retention, and reproduction of presented information rather than active student thought. Student comments about notes included:

> I take my notes home when she gives them to us . . . She always writes them on the board . . . the important stuff, she puts on the board so we can remember, and we make sure we have all those notes when we're done.
>
> She writes notes on the chalkboard. You have to write [them] down on paper.
>
> Make sure you get every note that she gives you.

Notes are given, not taken. Knowledge has been reified, to be transmitted from textbooks and teachers to students, like the passing of the baton in a relay race. Thus, messages about the nature and sources of knowledge as well as subject matter information appear to be communicated to students.[3]

Interpersonal Aspects

Interpersonal aspects of implicit curricula typically refer to teacher-student relationships, but might also include other relationships such as teacher-administrator, teacher-parent, and student-student. Teacher-student relationships function as a source of social learning and establish a social context that can extend or constrain possibilities for academic learning. Teachers' attitudes and expectations (about themselves, their students, the subject matter, how learning occurs, and the role of schooling) influence classroom rules, their use of power, and resulting patterns of interaction. For example, how teachers communicate what are appropriate student behaviors and the consequences of noncompliance serves as a model

for students as well as more directly communicating the teacher's interpretation of social norms and values.

Classroom studies suggest that teachers tend to stress an institutionally sanctioned core of values that include timeliness, orderliness, task orientation, and acceptance of authority. This management core (LeCompte, 1978) is evident in both traditional and open classrooms (Bernstein, 1975; Bussis, Chittendon, & Amarel, 1976; Klein, 1980; LeCompte, 1978) and as early as kindergarten (LeCompte, 1980).

Interviews with middle school English, science, and social studies teachers regarding their curriculum purposes (Cornbleth & Korth, 1982) provide further illustration of the prominence of these core values. While the teachers' curricular concerns were wide ranging, aspects of LeCompte's (1978) management core were quite salient. They were usually mentioned under the rubric of responsibility. For example, the teachers indicated that student responsibility (doing the work and/or doing it well and on time) was most important for getting good grades in their classes. Also noted as important were class participation, and effort (showing interest, cooperation, and working to potential as perceived by the teacher).

Patterns of teacher-student interaction both influence and are reflected in classroom learning opportunities, specifically the academic activities in which students are engaged.

Typical activity sequences include (a) teacher question - student response - teacher reaction, and (b) teacher assignment - student performance - teacher evaluation. In both cases, the teacher controls the interaction as director and judge; the student's role is a passive, dependent one of complying with teacher demands in order to obtain a favorable evaluation. The differential status of teacher and students in these exchanges is evident in their respective rights and obligations. The teacher as questioner or assignment giver has the right to determine the topic and how it is to be pursued, to speak at any time, to select other participants and terminate their participation. The students have the obligation to respond when and as requested and to remain quietly cooperative and receptive at other times. When students resist or challenge these expectations, teachers tend to assert their authority in an effort to gain control of the interaction (see Dillon, 1981; Edwards, 1980; Hammersley, 1974). Occasionally, however, students are successful in negotiating a redefinition of the situation and altering the rules guiding interaction such as whether they must raise their hands and wait for the teacher's permission to speak (Copeland, 1980; also, see W. Martin, 1976).

Tentative findings from a field study of the beginning of the year at a middle school (Cornbleth, Korth, & Dorow, in progress) illustrate how rules governing teacher-student relationships are established and might extend or constrain learning

opportunities. In the social studies classes (7th grade geography, 8th grade U.S. history), teacher announcement and enforcement of procedural-behavioral regulations and academic expectations for students did not prompt direct student challenge. Both classes became highly structured and teacher directed; teacher defined and enforced orderliness became the norm.

The emphasis on order and control, on following rules and directions, produced clearly differentiated (super- and subordinate) teacher and student roles in these classes. Enforced orderliness seems to have offered several benefits: there was ample and equal opportunity for all students to learn something (e.g., since all students were to be seated quietly with their materials on their desks when the bell rang, academic activity could and usually did begin immediately); some degree of privacy and security within the classroom group was provided to individuals; and student compliance allowed the teacher to assist individual students while the others were "working." At the same time, learning opportunities were constrained, and student initiative was not encouraged. The emphasis on order seemed to discourage divergent thinking and reasoning and the expression of student ideas and beliefs. Most of the time was spent in modified recitation (teacher questions, student answers, and teacher elaboration) and seatwork, both intended to foster the acquisition and recall of "facts." Also, the slow pacing of academic activities (e.g.,

"don't write in the answer until I tell you to") may have served to limit more able students by providing less opportunity in relation to their potential.

Among the messages that might be communicated by these interaction patterns are that knowledge is predetermined, that most if not all questions have simple right answers, that one's own thoughts and feelings are not important, that patience and passive compliance are rewarded while initiative and originality are discouraged, and that learning occurs primarily in competitive, impersonal situations directed by others.

Institutional Aspects

Institutional aspects of implicit curricula include the school's policies, routine procedures and rituals, the social structure of the school, and the array of extracurricular activities and services available to students and the community. Policies, procedures, and rituals include the grading system, ability grouping or tracking practices, and patriotic or other ceremonies. Among the messages that might be communicated by these features of school life are the desirability of competition, meritocracy, efficiency, and unquestioning national loyalty. To the extent that a school's social structure is hierarchical, characterized by differentiation of policy-making, supervisory, and implementation roles, it might communicate parallel messages regarding authority relationships, rational management, and compliance. Extracurricular activities and services may provide

affiliation, independence, and success opportunities for students, thus moderating the impact of other aspects of schooling and making them more palatable. Or, they may simply extend the school's contribution to stratification and the socialization of students for adult roles.

Even when the social organization of the school (or of classrooms within a school) appear to be "open," other messages may be communicated. Open classrooms and schools, characterized by flexible use of time and space and some form of individualization, may offer little more than an aura of freedom and equality (see Bernstein, 1975; Czajkowski & King, 1975; Smollet, 1973). Their implicit curricula may be quite similar to those of traditional schools and classrooms.

Similarly, other institutional arrangements cannot be taken at face value. Peer tutoring programs, for example, can foster cooperation or exacerbate academic status differences among students. Neither individualization nor mastery learning-criterion referenced evaluation necessarily eliminates competition as indicated by observations of students racing through sequentially organized programs to get ahead of their peers (e.g., by completing more activity cards, by moving from the gold to the blue reading book).

Vivid illustration of the differential messages that might be communicated by apparently similar institutional arrangements is provided by Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage (1982) in

their study of exemplary Individually Guided Education (IGE) elementary schools. Although all six schools were model implementers of the IGE management reform, there was considerable variation in the substance of teaching and learning and the implicit messages communicated. Popkewitz et al. (1982) distinguished among illusory, technical, and constructive conditions of schooling. Illusory schools offer form and appearance but little or no academic substance. The range of content and learning activities is limited; rote memorization of information unrelated to students' experiences is stressed, the assumption being that knowledge is static and that conscientious students will accept predetermined right answers. It is further assumed that students must be properly socialized before they can benefit from substantive learning opportunities, and discipline and ritual are emphasized. For example, students might regularly recite the Pledge of Allegiance but rarely if ever engage in examination of the concepts of republic, liberty, or justice. Proper behavior (e.g., cooperation with school and teacher demands, attention to assigned tasks) and espousal of democratic norms take precedence over meaningful social studies or other academic learning.

Technical schools offer a preplanned series of activities intended to produce measurable competencies that can be checked off as students demonstrate mastery of them, often by completing worksheets. The content is limited to presumably discrete skills and bits of information. If there is time available after

prescribed activities have been completed, integration of content and student interests might be pursued. Official learning (what counts for grades) tends to be mechanical and unrelated to students' experiences; knowledge is standardized, and right answers are predetermined. Students are expected to strive to attain the objectives set for them -- within the bounds of explicit discipline and management procedures that are intended to promote efficiency.

Constructive schools offer opportunities for students to pursue their own interests, engage in a variety of activities, and examine a broad range of content and possibilities. Comprehension rather than memorization is sought, with content being integrated and related to students' experiences. It is assumed that knowledge is tentative, that there are multiple ways of learning and knowing, and that different perspectives ought to be considered. For example, along with government structures and processes, students might examine various meanings of democracy and the possibilities of economic and social as well as political democracy. Learning activities are designed to foster students' exercise of rights and responsibilities, and students are expected to demonstrate independence and initiative.

While there is considerable evidence regarding the presence and operation of implicit curricula, documentation of effects on students remains sketchy. Some evidence regarding the impact of implicit curricula that is particularly relevant to

social education can be found in the political socialization and citizenship education literature (see Ehman, 1980; Cornbleth, 1982a). Although manifest curricula effectively transmit some political information, particularly to lower SES students, they do not appear to substantially influence political attitudes or participation. School and classroom climate and student participation in extracurricular and school governance activities, however, do seem to be important influences. For example, an open classroom climate in which controversial issues are freely discussed and students believe they can influence classroom events shows a consistently strong relationship with political and participatory attitudes, including higher political efficacy and trust and lower political cynicism and alienation (see, for example, Hawley, 1976, on the "implicit civics curriculum"). Participation in school governance and extracurricular activities is also related to students' political attitudes as is school organization and governance climate; less authoritarian school environments that afford varied opportunities for meaningful student participation are associated with positive political attitudes and behavior. In contrast, regular engagement in patriotic rituals, the use of repetitive worksheets, and an emphasis on political "facts," tend to be negatively related to students' political knowledge and democratic beliefs (see Torney, Oppenheim, & Farnen, 1975). Overall, this research suggests that the school milieu and the manner in which social studies is conducted (i.e., implicit curricula) have

as much or more impact on students' political learning, particularly on their political beliefs and participatory behavior, than do the topics, activities, and materials constituting the formal program.

Mediation, Negotiation, and Change

Schools, with their implicit and manifest curricula, seem to be neither the all powerful instruments of cultural reproduction as some have claimed nor the centers of resistance and prime sources of emancipation as others have hoped. Instead, schools appear to encompass elements fostering stability and stresses that might provide impetus for change.

Claims regarding the reproductive power of implicit curricula tend to ignore other, concurrent influences on students such as family, peers, and media and to assume that schools and teachers are totally controlling. These claims also appear to be based on the assumption that the messages of implicit curricula are transmitted in such a manner that they are wholly accepted by most students. However, students differentially mediate implicit as well as manifest curricula, both individually and collectively. For example, student subcultures or peer groups (whose values and norms may be in direct conflict with those of the school) mediate the schools' potential influence and might serve to moderate its impact (see Apple, 1980; Cusick, 1973) or reject it altogether (see Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Willis, 1977). Also, many students

seem to become adept at "playing school," that is, keeping up appearances and seeming to go along in order to gain advantages without internalizing the values or views of the world communicated by implicit curricula (see Lacey, 1977 on "strategic compliance"). Many also engage in negotiations to modify teachers' definition of the situation to their perceived advantage (see W. Martin, 1976). As Waller (1932) has convincingly argued, some conflict between students and their teachers and schools is inherent in the conditions of compulsory, mass instruction. Even in "the orthodox school, old style," students

> inevitably attempted to establish their own social order independently of teachers. . . . The social order which the teacher worked out in advance and attempted to establish could never be quite complete . . . In the interstices . . . there sprang up spontaneous life of students. There was always a loophole, and life always found the loophole . . . The conflict that always arose between the teacher definitions and the pupil definitions . . . were made more severe by the fact that the students never quite accepted the teacher-ordained social order as one of the unalterable facts of life. (pp. 309-310)

The majority of students appear to neither completely adopt nor reject the messages imparted by implicit curricula. Between the extremes of commitment and rebellion are options ranging from detached acceptance and accommodation to resistance and

subversion. Given that implicit curricula are only one of several influences on students and that these influences are mediated and, to a considerable extent, negotiated by students, how students differentially filter and act on messages conveyed by implicit curricula cannot be ignored in assessing implicit curricular processes and effects.

Finally, what might be the value of the implicit curricula construct to those who would pursue description, explanation, and improvement of school experience and the extension of social justice? Its analytic value has been limited. Implicit curricula has generally been used as an umbrella term, encompassing most if not all that is "wrong" with schools. The resulting amorphousness tends to distract and obscure both systematic inquiry and constructive action that might alleviate whatever is taken to be the problem. A related difficulty is the tendency to equate implicit curricular messages with effects and thus to create a tautology (see Dreeben, 1976) or a non-falsifiable argument (Merelman, 1980). While such arguments might be useful for critique of the seemingly antidemocratic and anti-intellectual features of schooling, they neither demonstrate nor explain the claimed oppression and how it might be mitigated.

The value of the implicit curricula construct is mainly heuristic. It calls attention to aspects of schooling that are usually only vaguely recognized and remain largely unexamined, particularly the schools' conservative socialization functions

and multiple social contexts. It highlights the importance of examining the curriculum in use -- the circumstances and manner of implementation as well as explicit curriculum content. What is to be found then, when one looks for implicit curricula, are the social relations and structure of school knowledge and experience.

Examination of implicit curricula as social relations and structure requires contextualized studies of school phenomena (see Cornbleth, 1982b). It seems futile, for example, to develop, introduce, and evaluate new social studies programs with little consideration of the settings or manner in which they are used. Given the complexities of schooling and the myriad constraints facing individual teachers, it is similarly naive to expect that malevolent social relations can be expunged simply by introducing different organizational or institutional patterns (Giroux & Penna, 1979) or that teacher awareness is a sufficient condition for sustaining beneficent change (Cornbleth, 1980). To expect critique, consciousness, or classroom level change proposals to transform schooling is to create one's own disappointments

If the experience or effects of schooling are to be substantially modified, we need to first clarify both the problem to be resolved and the preferred state of affairs. Then we can seek out the specific obstacles to realization of our goals, recognizing that both implicit and explicit curricula are not only socially constructed but serve some established interests and perceived

needs and, consequently, are resistant to change. Understanding how and why identified obstacles have come into being and persisted may well inform efforts to dismantle them (see Whitty, 1976, 1977). The pursuit of such understanding would likely extend our research and change efforts beyond classrooms to the wider society in which we and our schools are inextricably embedded. Reid's (1979) observations regarding conditions for curriculum change are applicable to implicit as well as manifest curricula. He cautions that

> to have an adequate sense of how a learning environment can be changed, and what features of it we need to be able to influence in order to produce change, we need research that helps us to understand how the status quo came about, what tends toward its maintenance and what conflicts and dissonances point the way to possible modifications. Such research has to take account of historical perspectives, of the meanings that participants place on events, of the social and political context of the curriculum and of the moral and ethical bases on which decisions about the curriculum rest. (pp. 35-36)

Notes

1. Although Philip Jackson is acknowledged as the first to use the term in the United States (in his 1968 book, Life in Classrooms), the presence of what has become known as hidden curriculum was identified earlier by others. In Experience and Education, for example, John Dewey (1938) referred to the "collateral learning" of attitudes that occurs in schools and may have more long range importance than the explicit school curriculum. While Vallance (1974) has provided historical perspective regarding its origins, the hidden curriculum of contemporary schooling remains a notably elusive phenomenon (Dreeben, 1976; J. Martin, 1976; Vallance, 1972, 1980).

2. Shaver, Davis, and Helburn (1978) provide evidence from the Case Studies in Science Education (Stake & Easley, 1978) indicating that this is usually the case in social studies classrooms. Social studies teachers are concerned that students acquire an "accepted body of knowledge" and "tend to rely on, and believe in, the textbook as the source of [that] knowledge" (p. 10). Situational differences are evident, however. White (1980), for example, illustrates how social constraints on the construction of knowledge about other cultures in elementary classrooms sometimes supersede textbook knowledge. At Willow school, where outwardly friendly and courteous behavior was the norm, teachers' comments about other ways of life and students' contributions were usually positive. For example, "plastic and touristy Indian items"

that students brought in for "show and tell" were accepted even though they were not authentic and tended to perpetuate stereotypes.

3. That knowledge is socially constructed and that knowledge can be created as well as acquired are infrequently considered in the social studies education literature as well. See Popkewitz (1982) on knowledge and social studies curriculum.

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